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ASTONISHING X-MEN

JOSS WHEDON • JOHN CASSADAY

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HERE'S WHERE WE STAND.

WE HAVE THEIR POWERLORD, INSIDE HIS MOST IMPREGNABLE PRISON.

WE PREGGED IT QUICK ENOUGH...

WE'RE THE X-MEN.

SOLDIERS WILL COME. SYLATIN WILL BE MASSING A FORCE EVEN NOW. HE'LL KNOW HOW TO GET IN.

WHAT KIND OF FIGHT CAN WE PUT UP?

PAULLETZ?

WE'VE SECURED THE FACILITY AND PICKED UP SOME IMPRESSIVE WEAPONRY. THEY COME HARD, WE CAN STILL BUY YOU A FEW HOURS.

CAN WE USE KRUUN AS A BARGAINING CHIP?

THEY WILL DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO PROTECT HIM, BUT...

"BARGAINING" PROBABLY ISN'T A POPULAR CONCEPT.

AND IF THEY BEGIN TO SEE KRUUN AS WEAK...

THERE'S A CHANCE SYLATIN MAY NUKE THE JOINT ANYWAY. HE'S AFTER KRUUN'S THRONE; HE WAS MAKING A DEAL WITH US.

NO DOUBT AT KRUUN'S BEHEST.

TREACHERY IS FOR THE CIVILIZED, AGENT BRAND. SYLATIN WILL PROTECT HIS POWERLORD WITH HIS LIFE.

STANDING AROUND TALKING FEELS A LOT LIKE STANDING AROUND TALKING. WHEN DOES PETE GET TO THROW ME AT SOMETHING?

OUR PRIORITY IS THE MISSILE. WE CAN EITHER DISABLE IT UP CLOSE OR CONVINCE KRUUN TO STAND DOWN.

WE WORK BOTH ANGLES. TWO SQUADS.

HANK, YOU GET KITTY TO THE MISSILE. IF THE TWO OF YOU CAN'T DISABLE THAT THING, IT CAN'T BE DONE.

I'LL MAKE SURE THEY GET THERE SAFELY.

NO YOU WON'T.

AGENT BRAND KNOWS THE TERRAIN SO SHE'S IN. LOGAN AND ARMOR ARE THE ESCORT.

SCOTT--

NOT ASKING, PETE.

YOU'RE OUR ACE IN THE HOLE. YOU CAN ACTUALLY DO THE THING KRUUN FEARS MOST. KILL THE PLANET.

IT'S UGLY, BUT IT'S A CARD WE GOTTA HOLD.

AGHANNE AND EMMA ARE WITH US. REST OF YOU ARE HOLDING THE FORT. MAKE A BIG NOISE OF IT; THE MORE FORCES YOU DRAW HERE THE BETTER CHANCE EVERYONE ELSE HAS.

OUR BOYS GOT WORKED OVER PRETTY BAD. WE'RE READY FOR SOME FIREWORKS.

APPRECIATED. QUESTIONS?

I NEED A MINUTE ALONE.

WE DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TIME--

NOT ASKING, SCOTT.

SIR.

YOU THINK IT'S BRAND?

SOMEONE'S BEHIND THIS "*PROPHECY*", BRAND SAID VERY CLEARLY WE SHOULD MAKE IT HAPPEN.

IF IT CAME TO THAT. YOU REALLY THINK THAT'S HER GAME?

AS A SCIENTIST, I WON'T SAY FOR CERTAIN SOMETHING I CAN'T PROVE.

AS A CAT... THE LADY IS LYING.

SHE'S HIDING SOMETHING BIG.

YOU'RE MY BIGGEST BRAIN AND MY OLDEST FRIEND.

MOMENT COMES YOU HAVE TO TAKE ACTION, I'LL NEVER QUESTION IT.

SO HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD YOUR POWER BACK?

SINCE BEFORE LAUGHING BOY BROUGHT ME BACK TO LIFE. EMMA DIDN'T EVEN KNOW. FIGURED IT MIGHT SERVE.

WELL, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU. ALL OF YOU.

YEAH...

DON'T GET USED TO IT.

I HATE THIS PLAN.

NOT JUST THE PART WHERE I CAN'T TOUCH YOU FOR THE NEXT TWELVE HOURS; I HATE THE *PLAN.*

SCOTT'S PUTTING YOU RIGHT WHERE THE PROPHECY SAID YOU'D BE. DON'T LET THINGS GET OUT OF YOUR CONTROL.

I AM AN X-MAN, KATYA. I AM NOT IN THE BUSINESS OF DESTROYING PLANETS.

ESPECIALLY WHEN I AM ON THEM.

SCOTT WOULD RATHER KEEP YOU CLOSE, BUT I THINK YOU'LL BE OF MORE USE TO THE AWAY TEAM.

STOP THAT MISSILE OR...WELL, THERE ISN'T MUCH OF AN *"OR"* FOR ANYONE, IS THERE?

I DON'T FEAR ANNIHILATION AS YOU DO. I JUST WANT TO BE SURE YOU WON'T GO BACK ON YOUR WORD WHEN WE'RE DONE.

YOU'RE PROGRAMMED TO KNOW ME BETTER THAN THAT. HELP US SAVE THE WORLD...

...AND I'LL GIVE YOU CHARLES XAVIER.

SIMPLE ENOUGH.

PETER WALKS INTO THAT LITTLE BALL OF LIGHT, RIPS THE CENTRAL DISTRIBUTION CORE FROM ITS MOORING, DROPS IT INTO THE MAIN SOURCE DOWN BELOW-- DO I HAVE THIS RIGHT?

YES. CHAIN REACTION.

JUST A FEW HOURS TILL TOTAL CORE ERUPTION.

IT MAKES NO SENSE. TO PUT YOUR WORLD AT RISK WITH SUCH A FRAGILE, UNSTABLE ENERGY SOURCE...

WE PRIZE EFFICIENCY OVER SAFETY. IS IT VERY DIFFERENT ON EARTH?

NOT AS MUCH AS WE'D LIKE. SHALL WE BEGIN? I BELIEVE HE'S WAKING UP.

NO...

THIS IS VERY SIMPLE.

OUR WORLD FOR YOURS.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE.

WE HAVEN'T DONE *ANYTHING* YET. DISABLE YOUR MISSILE AND WE FADE AWAY. YOU'RE THE HERO THAT SAVED THE BREAKWORLD.

THE RETALIATOR WILL FIRE AS SCHEDULED. NOTHING YOU DO CAN STOP IT.

SERIOUSLY:

ARE YOU *TRYING* TO WIPE OUT YOUR WORLD?

YOU SURE YOU'RE UP TO IT, SIR?

I CAN POINT AND I CAN SHOOT.

SHE KICKS UP, NOT BACK. IT'S PULSE FIRE, SO IT GETS HOT FAST.

THIS IS SWEETER THAN THE SHOCK STICKS WE GOT OFF THE BYYNTU PIRATES.

SHHHK

TH POOM!

SHHK

WHERE HAVE THEY TAKEN MY LORD?

BRAND SHOULDA KILLED YOU DAY ONE.

YOUR LIFE FOR HER MISTAKES.

SKROONSH

AND MINE FOR MINE.

THIS ISN'T GOING THE WAY I HOPED.

ISN'T IT?

YOU GOT SOMETHING TO SAY TO ME?

SCADS

IT'LL HAVE TO SIT.

WE GOT THIRTY VESSELS MOVING TO INTERCEPT. I THOUGHT THE POWERLORD'S PRIVATE RIDE WOULD SLIP US THROUGH, BUT THEY MUST'VE GOT WORD. WE NEED A PLAN.

LADY KEEPS TALKING LIKE SHE'S IN CHARGE...MAKES MY KNUCKLES ITCH.

I'M LOOKING FOR SUGGESTIONS, ALL RIGHT?

LAST TIME, SUMMERS PUT HIMSELF IN A RESCUE CRAFT AND *DIED* TO KEEP US FROM GETTING TAGGED. YOU GOT THE STONES FOR THAT?

HOW CAN I NOT KILL THESE MORONS...?

RELAX. THE INTERCEPTING CRAFT ARE FALLING BACK. THEIR COMPUTER SYSTEMS THINK THEY'RE FAILING

YOU'VE INTERFACED? CAN YOU ACCESS THE MISSILE?

NOTHING. IT'S NOT NETWORKED, OR...

OR?

I'M GETTING A SIGNATURE FROM THE BASE THAT I CAN'T DECODE. RUNNING IT AGAINST MY RECORDS, I'M GETTING ONE NAME.

"RASPUTIN."

YOUR MADNESS HAS LED US HERE. YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED ON THE FIELD OF HONOR.

BELIEVE ME, POWERLORD...

I DID.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE YOU CAN RESTORE YOUR GOOD NAME--BE A TRUE CHAMPION OF YOUR PEOPLE...

NEGOTIATION? HOW QUICKLY IT COMES WHEN YOUR VAUNTED STRENGTH IS GONE.

BUT YOU'RE BEYOND MY HELP. IF YOU ARE GOING TO BEG...

"...START WITH THE METAL MAN."

SCOTT, LOVE...

HOW FAR DO WE TAKE THIS?

THROOM!

NNNAA--

DIE!!

AGHANNE!

INSIDE THE FIELD! NOW!

NO!

SMASH

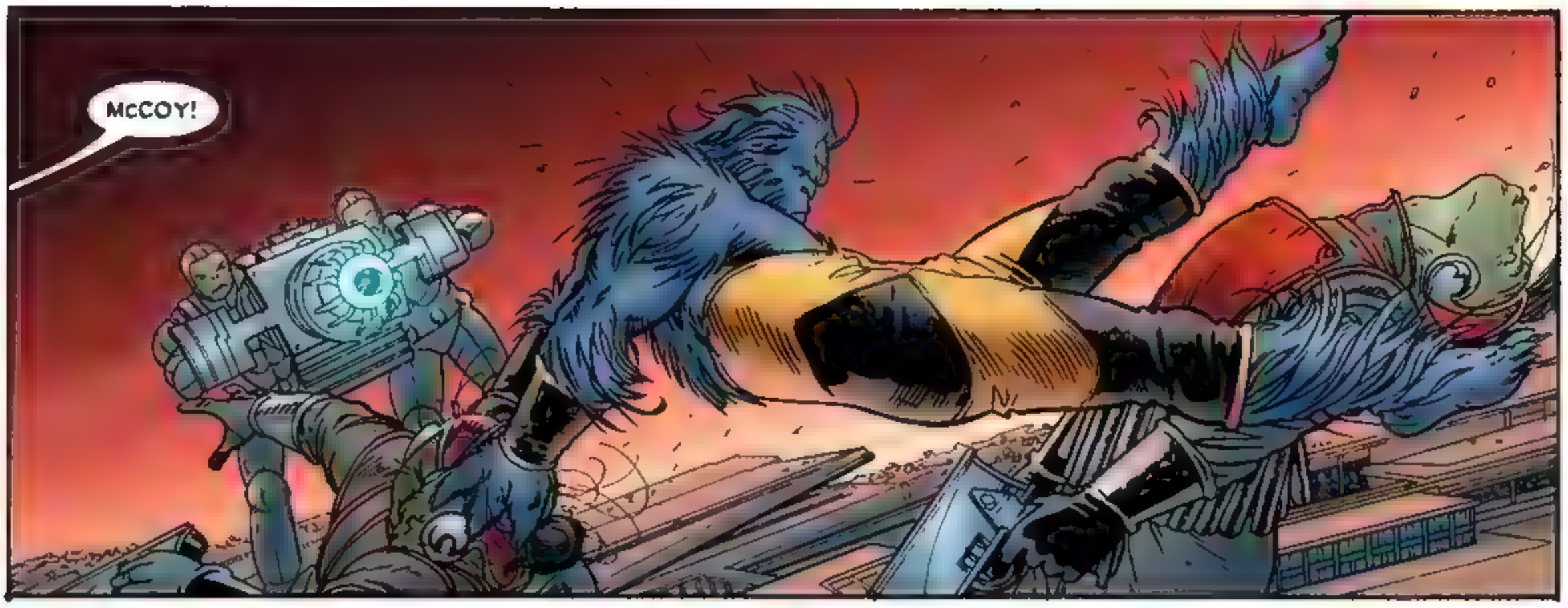
EMMA, MOVE!

AT LAST, THIS ENDS AS IT WAS MEANT TO

OH, PLEASE.

FALL BACK!!

KEEP GOING!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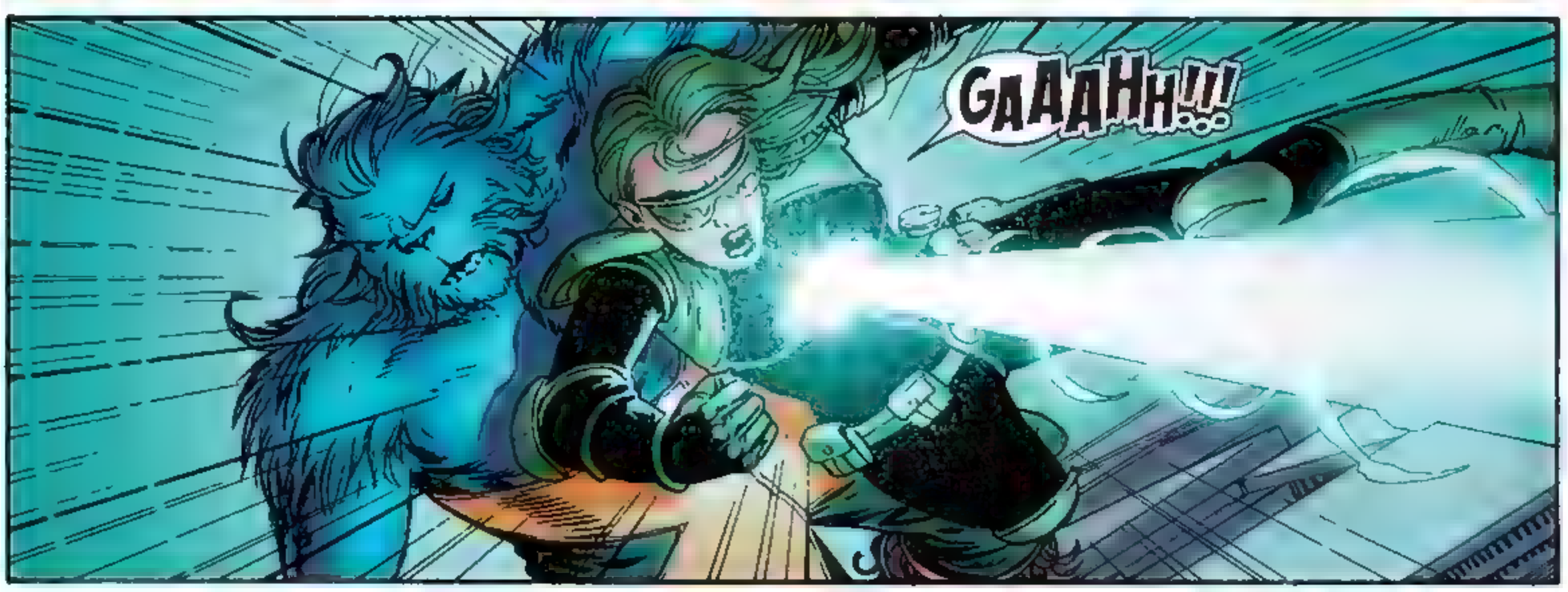
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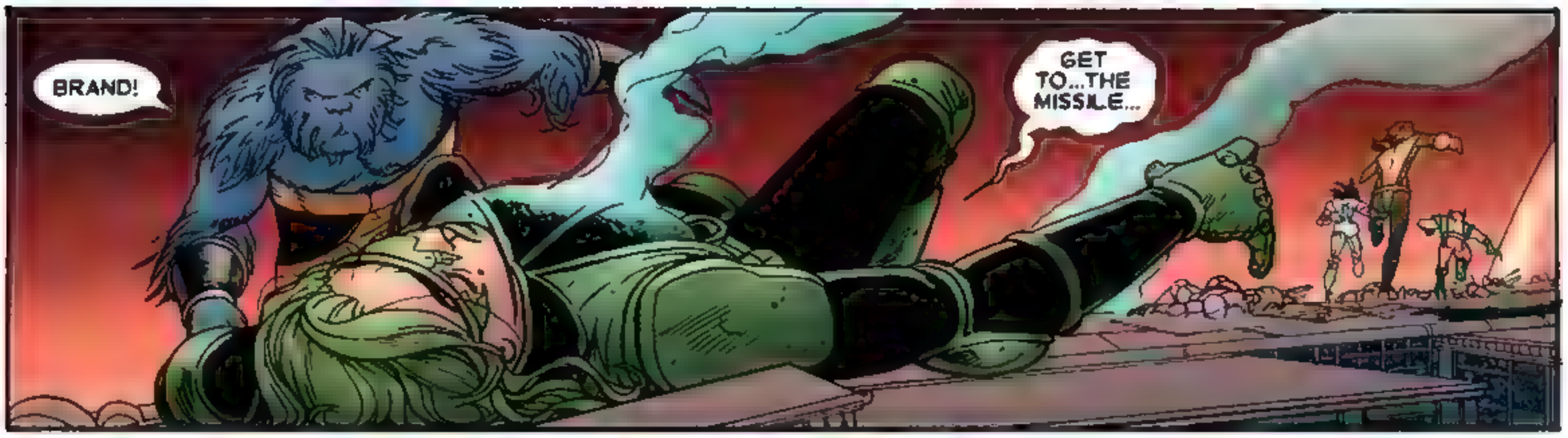
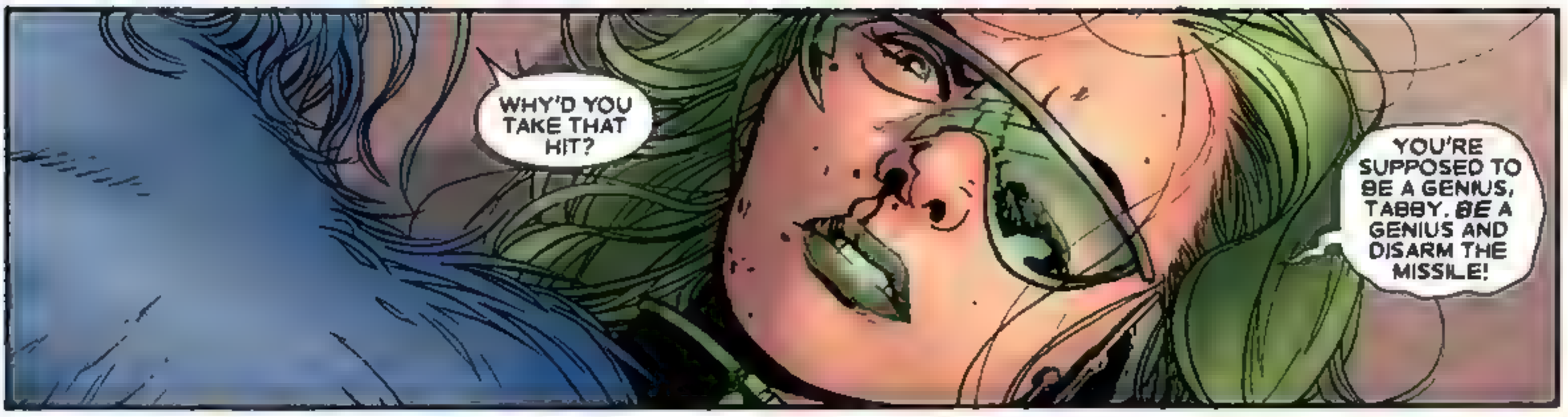
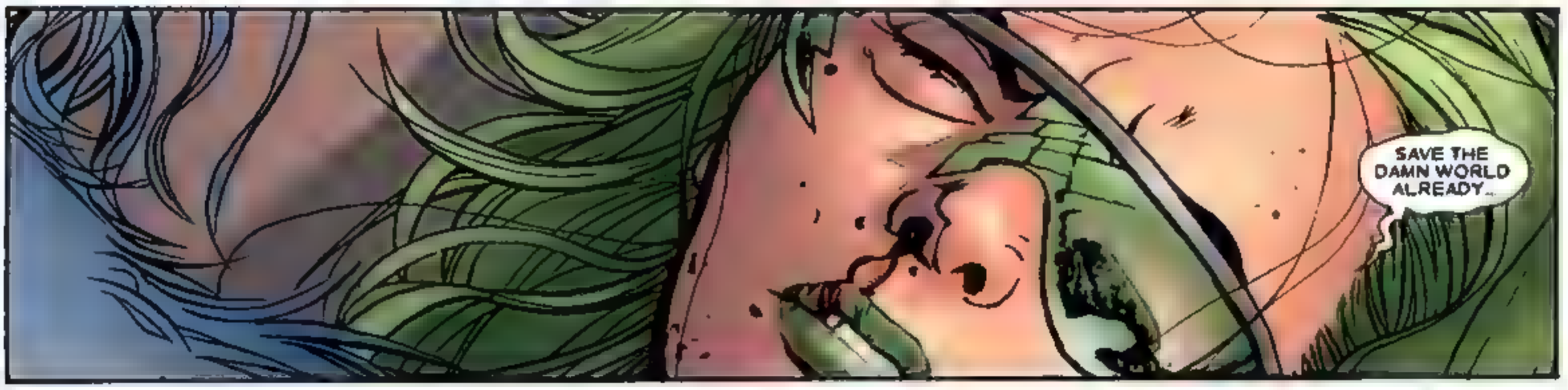

BRAND!
GET TO...THE MISSILE...


WHY'D YOU TAKE THAT HIT?
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE A GENIUS, TABBY. BE A GENIUS AND DISARM THE MISSILE!


SAVE THE DAMN WORLD ALREADY...

THIS IS SO PRIMITIVE...

CONSTANT POSITION ADJUSTMENT FROM THE ORBIT THRUSTERS, COMBUSTION DETONATION SYSTEM, AND A CLOCK NO UPLINK TO THE MISSILE

WHAT ABOUT THAT RASPUTIN SIGNATURE YOU COULDN'T DECODE? HOW IS THIS CONNECTED TO PETER?

NOT PETER. ILLYANA RASPUTIN.

DAMMIT! OF COURSE.

IT'S NOT ILLYANA; IT'S *MAGIC.*

DANGER CAN'T READ IT PRECISELY 'CAUSE THEY'VE THROWN UP MYSTICAL PROTECTION FOR THE THING. WE'VE GOT NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT KIND.

ANYBODY WANNA HEAR ABOUT THE ARMY HEADING OUR WAY? IT'S A COLORFUL STORY...

ENOUGH.

I'LL TAKE THE SHORTCUT.

I AM NOT GREAT THINKER.

BUT I BELIEVE I UNDERSTAND THIS NOW.

THEN YOU UNDERSTAND HOW IT MUST END.

YES. I RIP OUT THE CORE AND DESTROY YOUR WORLD...

... JUST AS YOU PLANNED, AGHANNE.

PRYDE?

I'VE REACHED THE MISSILE. NO CONTROLS, HATCHES-- THE SHELL IS PERFECTLY SMOOTH.

McCOY IS SAYING TO LOOK INSIDE.

HE IS SAYING, "QUICKLY".

GOD, I HATE THIS STUFF...

NOW THIS IS WEIRD...

AHH!

IT IS OVER!

I THINK NOT.

FOR YOUR WORLD, IT IS.

THE RETALIATOR FIRES IN SECONDS.

IT CANNOT BE STOPPED.

NOTHING.

I'VE GONE MORE...THAN AN MILE...
NO WIRES, NO WORKS... I...
THIS METAL...
WHAH!
THERE'S A SPACE NEAR THE TOP, BUT NO DAMN CONTROLS!
HOW THE HELL DO THEY GUIDE THIS THING?
BRRRRRRRRRRMMMMMMMMMM

RRRRRRRRRRRRRRMMMMMMM
SHE'S FIRING!
OH NO... NO...

IT'S GOT NO THRUSTERS!

OF COURSE NOT.

PRECISE TIMING. PERFECT TRAJECTORY.

BUT NO GUIDANCE SYSTEMS, NO ENGINE...

...JUST A GIANT ROD OF METAL THAT'S HOLLOW AT THE FRONT.

"IT'S NOT A MISSILE.

"IT'S A BULLET."

G85
EMPIRE